(c) if so, with what results?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI A.K. ANTONY): (a) to (c) Xinhua (official Chinese news agency) reported on 19th June 2007 that China would begin building a "highway" on Mount Everest in Tibet Autonomous Region so as to ease the path of those bearing the Olympic torch. Construction of the road will kick off at Everest Base Camp. The project aims to turn a 108-km rough road linking Tingri County of Xigaze prefecture at the foot of the mountain to the Base Camp into a blacktop highway fenced by undulating guardrails. On completion, the highway will become a major route for tourists and mountaineers. The Government keeps a constant watch on all developments having a bearing on India's security and takes all necessary measures to safeguard it.

Procurement of fighter aircrafts for IAF

†1089. SHRIMATI SUSHMA SWARAJ: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that 126 fighter planes are being procured for the Indian Air Force;

(b) whether there has been an understanding with Russia/America for partnership regarding joint development and manufacturing of fighter planes; and

(c) by when the fighter planes are likely to be procured?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI A.K. ANTONY): (a) Government is processing a case for procurement of 126 Multi Medium Role Combat Aircraft for the Indian Air Force.

(b) There is no understanding at present with either Russia or America regarding joint development or manufacturing of these fighter planes.

(c) The purchase of aircraft is being made in accordance with the Defence Procurement Procedure-2006 which also indicates likely time to be taken for conclusion of contracts for such major purchases.

Foreign tour of Indian Army Officers

1090. SHRI JAI PARKASH AGGARWAL: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether military officers are allowed to contact the foreign missions directly;

(b) whether it is a fact that foreign tour of several Indian Army Officers on the invitation of United States of America were permitted by his Ministry as reported in the media;

(c) whether the Naval Chief has defined this tour of military officers as the violation of security rules; and

(d) if so, the steps taken by Government in this regard?

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI A.K. ANTONY): (a) The Military Officers may deal with foreign missions for specific purposes after obtaining prior approval of competent authority.

(b) The Government of United States of America (USA) invites serving defence officers of India to visit the USA as part of their IMET programme (International Military Education and Training) and bilateral defence cooperation programme. Such visits are for the purposes of training and bilateral reciprocal visits.

(c) and (d) The Chief of Naval Staff had not raised any objections on such visits by defence personnel to the USA.

Army Cantonment in Hoshiyarpur

†1091. SHRI DHARAM PAL SABHARWAL: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government had considered to set up an army cantonment in the district of Hoshiyarpur a few years ago;

(b) whether it is also a fact that a survey has also been conducted by Government to set up a cantonment area;

(c) if so, the amount incurred on getting the survey done;

(d) the time it will take for the implementation of this scheme; and

(e) the details of the action taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI A.K. ANTONY): (a) There is no proposal for establishment of a cantonment under the Cantonments Act, 2006 at Hoshiyarpur District in Punjab.

(b) to (e) The question does not arise in view of reply to (a) above.

Shortage of Officers

1092. SHRI BALAVANT *ALIAS* BAL APTE:
SHRI VINAY KATIYAR:

Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is a shortage of officers in the Armed Forces of the country;

(b) if so, the details thereof, force-wise; and

(c) the steps taken/being taken by Government to fill the vacant posts in the Armed Forces?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI A.K. ANTONY): (a) to (c) There is a shortage of officer in the Armed Forces. The details are as follows:-

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.